

ABSTRACT

Title of Document: *COFFEE & BISCUIT: A VARIATION ON
HENRIK IBSEN'S A DOLL'S HOUSE*

Teresa Ann Bayer, Masters of Fine Arts, 2013.

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Dance, and Performance Studies

Artistic adaptation is most often defined as the process of transporting or transforming a particular work of theatre to a different location, time period, or situation. This choice allows a play to be seen and understood in a new light, illuminating particular themes or ideas inherent to the script or story.

Coffee & Biscuit is a 1950's Technicolor variation on Henrik Ibsen's *A Doll's House* in which we see Nora Helmer's perfect world of Hoovers and Jell-O molds topple around her. This darkly whimsical romp, featuring both puppets and live actors, is an adaptation that examines how a contemporary theatre audience can be provoked to question the gender roles constructed by society and the media.

COFFEE & BISCUIT
A VARIATION ON HENRIK IBSEN'S *A DOLL'S HOUSE*

By

Teresa Ann Bayer

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Dedication

For my mother.

Acknowledgements

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1950's Advertisements

Mid-twentieth century print advertisements are still recognized today for their innovative design and catchy sayings. Beyond that, they are also acknowledged as a primary documentation of the media's construction of gender and gender roles in the decade following the Second World War. These images directly influenced the technicolored world of *Coffee & Biscuit*, both aesthetically and thematically.

Image 1:*Chase and Sanborn Coffee Advertisement*

The Chase and Sanborn Coffee advertisement shown below features a man “spanking” his wife for not testing the coffee for freshness before she purchased it. Although the ad is intended to be playful, the man clearly wields power over the woman in a violent manner. This advertisement was one of many from the 1950’s that depict a similar power dynamic between husband and wife.



Image 2:
 1950 Beer Advertisement with art by Douglass Rockwell

The following advertisement features a strict adherence to gender roles: a man displays his prized catch to his friends while a woman serves the group beer.



"The Prize Catch," by Douglass Rockwell. Number 43 in the series "Home Life in America."

Beer belongs...enjoy it

In this home-loving land of ours . . . in this America of kindness, of friendship, of good-humored tolerance . . . perhaps no beverages are more "at home" on more occasions than good American beer and ale.

For beer and ale are the kinds of beverages Americans like. They belong—to pleasant living, to good fellowship, to sensible moderation. And our right to enjoy them, this too belongs—to our own American heritage of personal freedom.



AMERICA'S BEVERAGE OF MODERATION
 United States Brewers Foundation . . . Chartered 1962



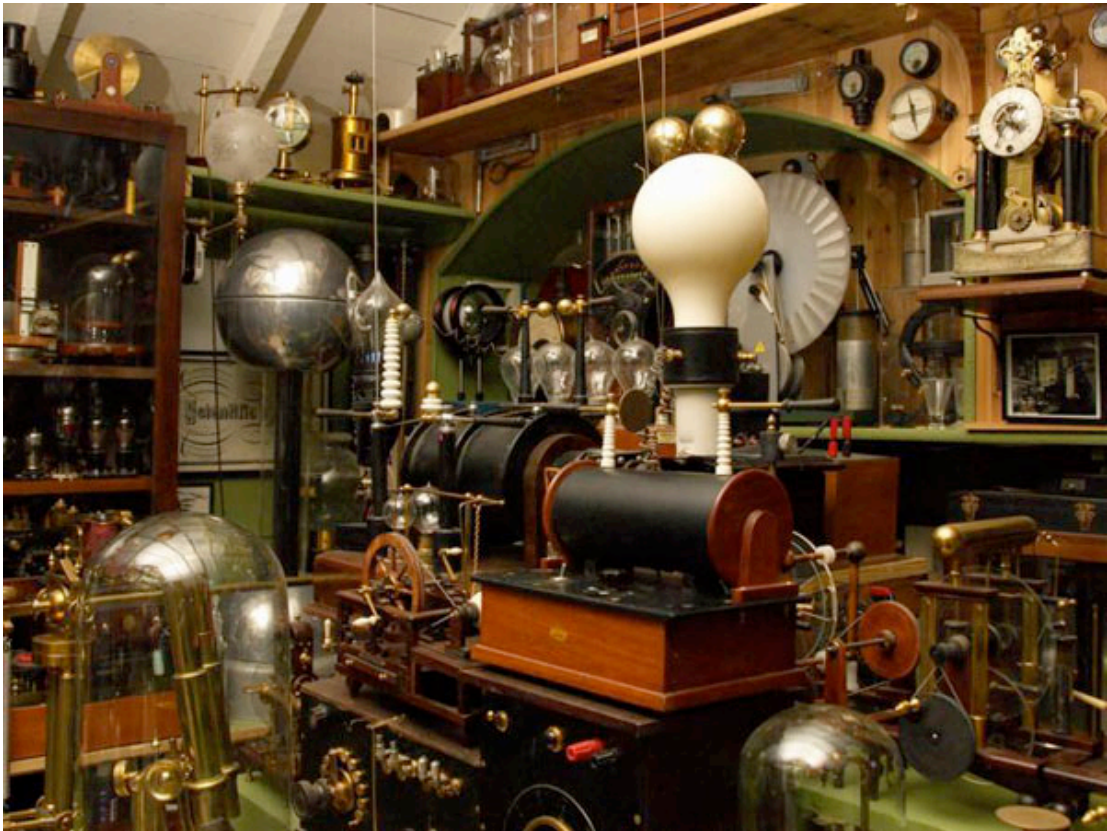
Steampunk

“Steampunk” is a subgenre of science fiction that merges traditional elements of Science Fiction with Victorian and modern “Goth” culture. In the same manner, *Coffee & Biscuit* melds several different cultures and genres, namely science Fiction, Norwegian literature, and 1950’s “Suburbia” culture.

The term “steampunk” is also used to describe styles and pieces of art, clothing, literature, music, and lifestyle that are influenced by what is considered steampunk, as characterized above. *Coffee & Biscuit* utilizes steampunk inspired music and costume (the corset on the outside of Nora’s dress) to bring its story to life.

Image 3:
Steampunk Aesthetic Example

The image below exemplifies the steampunk genre because it merges traditional Victorian pieces and hyper-stylized gadgetry. This mirrors *Coffee & Biscuit's* use of traditional 1950's props, costumes, and ideas with an equally hyper-stylized use of technology (the television sets).



Television & Television Sets

Consumerism in the 1950's was at an all time high, partly because of the growing presence of the television in the American home. During the decade, the total number of sets sold in the United States grew from under ten million in 1950 to upwards of sixty-seven million by the end of the decade.

Image 4:
1956 NBC Television Advertisement

Below is a 1956 NBC television advertisement that mirrors both the layout of the world I created on the stage and the “Alice in Wonderland” quality of Nora’s journey within the play. In the play *Coffee & Biscuit*, the televisions become gateways into Nora’s subconscious, mirroring Alice’s looking glass, the gateway into Lewis Carroll’s protagonist’s imagination.



Image 5:
Wall of Television Sets

This wall of television sets designed by Plunge Productions, a set and prop construction company in the United Kingdom, inspired the use of screens in my interpretation of Ibsen's *A Doll's House*. The arrangement of the television sets and the blue glow emanating from them influenced the stage descriptions as written in the play and the scenic design as it was realized.



Television Programming

Image 6:

I Married Joan

The television series *I Married Joan* ran from 1952 to 1955 on NBC. According to Frank Cullen, in his book *Vaudeville, old and new, Volume 1*, Joan Davis plays a “whacky, bumbling, 40-year-old housewife who created exactly two disasters per show and embarrassed her husband, a judge.” (297) This was just one of a number of television shows in the 1950’s that was about a “featherbrained” woman and her husband. The screenshot below is taken from Episode 12, *Dreams*.



Image 7:
The Betty White Show

The Betty White Show aired from 1954 to 1955 and was structured as a magazine style daytime show featuring musicians and other guests, household advice, letters from the audience, and messages from the show's sponsors.



Commercials

1950's commercials, when not animated, featured the All-American white nuclear family enjoying the pleasures of consumerism, accompanied by clever catch phrases and jazzy jingles. Many of these commercials featuring living actors had illustrated backgrounds, creating a cartoon-like play on reality. *Coffee & Biscuit* played with a similar merging of mediums by placing the cartoonish puppets in the live theatrical performance space.

Image 8:
Ritz Cracker Commercial

Commercial Transcript:

MALE VOICE: Hey, hey, hey,
That supply of Ritz
Seems on the fritz.

FEMALE VOICE: No, no, no stop darling!
Don't blow you're top!
I always keep another box handy!

MALE VOICE: Dandy!

MALE & FEMALE VOICES: He knows Ritz Crackers are richer, crisper and his
mouth is full or he'd help us whisper only Nabisco MAKES RITZ!



Image 9:

*Swiss Crème Sandwiches Commercial**Commercial Transcript:*

MOTHER: You-ooo-ooo

DAUGHTER: You-oo

MOTHER: You-ooo-oo

SON: You-oo

MOTHER: I've got a Swiss Creme Sandwich for you!

Crisp golden cookie and in-between an extra thick

SON & DAUGHTER: It's my pick!

MOTHER: Filling of cream!

DAUGHTER: Dessert time!

MOTHER: Tea time!

SON: Don't miss Swiss!

FATHER: As the man around here you can quote me on this!

ALL: You-ooo-ooo

FATHER: It's Swiss Creme Sandwich

ALL: For you-ooo-oooo

MOTHER: And you-ooo too!

MALE VOICEOVER: A truly different creme sandwich baked my Nabisco. The luscious creamy fillings in a class by itself! There's not another like it, and these tempting vanilla cookies are so light they melt in your mouth.

ALL: You-ooo-ooo

FATHER: It's Swiss Creme Sandwich

ALL: For you-ooo-oooo

MOTHER: And you-ooo too!

ALL: Swiss Creme Sandwich!



Image 10:

*Sharpie the Parrot Commercial**Commercial Transcript:*

MALE VOICEOVER: Look sharp.

Feel Sharp.

And listen, mister.

How are you fixed for blades?

Do you have plenty?

How are you fixed for blades?

You better check!

Please make sure you have enough

Cause a worn out blade makes shavin' mighty tough.

How are you fixed for blades (You'd better look).

Gillette Blue Blades are neat!



Movement Vocabulary

Nora's background as a ballet dancer and as a prostitute contributes to her movement vocabulary. The following images inspired both the production's choreography, as well as Nora's physicality in the play.

Image 11

Dancer in Red Pointe Shoes

The still image of the woman bending over prostrate in the corner provokes in the viewer a feeling of isolation and desperation because of her body's physical arrangement and placement in the room. This physicality inspired Nora's choreography in Vignette 12, a melding of contemporary dance and classical ballet. (See APPENDIX 2: Image 28 & Image 29)



Image 12:
1950's Ballerina

The following figure is a postcard featuring the image of a ballerina from the 1950's.

The woman appears to be backstage, lost in thought. It is this same sort of thoughtful contemplation the audience encounters Nora in at the beginning of *Coffee & Biscuit*.



A tired ballerina rests from her labors

Image 13:

Katherine Wells and Ben Needham-Wood of Amy Seiwert's Imagery

Photo: David DeSilva

The strings in the image below create a web in which the man is trapped. Similarly, in *Coffee & Biscuit*, Nora wears a corset, whose ribbons ensnare her. The puppeteers control these chords, tightening the garment on her waist and pulling her through the space. [See APPENDIX 2: Image 27]



Image 14:

Nicole Pschetz in Energinmotion's "Be Lonely With Me"

Photo: Siobhan Bradshaw

This image of Brazilian physical performance artist Nicole Pschetz in Energinmotion's *Be Lonely with Me* resonates with my conception of Nora Helmer. She is both scared and fearless; silent, yet screaming. Pschetz is a member of the physical theater company Energinmotion, whose mission, according to their website, is to "devise new work that takes risks and at the same time connects with the audience... [They are] interest[ed]... [in exploring] realism and the progression towards stylization." This style of working is very much in line with my own creative performance philosophy, as I develop highly physical narrative-based performance art.



The Feminine Mystique

In her article *Looking Back at a Domestic Cri de Couer*, New York Times writer Janet Maslin discusses Betty Friedan's revolutionary book, *The Feminine Mystique*. She describes what Friedan calls the "problem that has no name" as the "depression, frustration, emptiness, guilt and dishonesty" felt by American housewives in the decade following the Second World War. Maslin continues, saying that Friedan "analyz[es] the way psychiatrists, women's magazines, marketers, educators and social scientists routinely lied to women about their need for feminine glamour." These "lies" are woven in to *Coffee & Biscuit* through the incorporation of a series of voiceovers and television clips that are played at choice points in the play.

Image 15:

1960: OCCUPATION: HOUSEWIFE: Anne Lemanski

Anne Lemanski's artwork shown below is part of her ten-piece series *A Century of Hair, 1900-1990*. Lemanski's piece *1960: Occupation: Housewife* is inspired by Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique* and is constructed of painted copper rod, vintage fabric, and thread. The artist expands on her website:

The sixties were the beginning of a lot of societal changes. I chose to focus on "the feminine mystique," the silent suffering of housewives yearning for a fulfillment other than that of running a household. Betty Friedan wrote a book titled "The Feminine Mystique," which ignited women's lib.

-Anne Lemanski

Friedan's text, and the revolutionary movement it fostered, inspired Lemanski's visual art, much as it influenced the development of *Coffee & Biscuit*.



Past Productions of *A Doll's House*

Image 16:

Theater Oberhausen, Nora oder Ein Puppenhaus.

Photo: Thomas Aurin

The image below is a production photograph from Theater Oberhausen's production of Ibsen's *A Doll's House*. The dark aesthetic and hyper-stylized physicality of this production inspired my own abstraction of Ibsen's classic play.



Image 17:
Mabou Mines' "A Doll's House"
Photo: Richard Termine

One of the most eminent American productions of *A Doll's House* was produced by American theatre company Mabou Mines. This production cast all of the male roles with actors under four feet tall. This choice challenged the audience's prevailing interpretation of Ibsen's play, and sparked both critical and theoretic debate.



Part 1: The Initial Idea

Two summers ago, while photographing the final dress rehearsal of Princeton Summer Theatre's production of Henrik Ibsen's *A Doll's House*, I was struck by the relevance of the play today, 134 years after its premiere at the Royal Theatre in Copenhagen. I saw a woman affected by forces outside of her control and struggling to claim her power. This woman was Nora Helmer, and in the first moments of Ibsen's play, she enters her home with a pile of parcels and a bag of macaroons from which she sneaks a few bites. Her husband, Torvald Helmer, calls out to her, "little lark", "little squirrel" (I.i.p1) from the other room, questioning her whereabouts, while dismissing her. At the sound of him, she hides her treats. He struts about the house, relating with his wife as if she were a doll: subject to his whims and desires.

Torvald does not know that his "featherheaded" (I.i.p3) wife is the reason why he is alive at the opening of the play. Several months before the action of the play begins, Nora secretly secured money to get her dying husband the medical care he needed by making a contract with Nils Krogstad, an employee of the same bank where her husband worked. However, a co-signer was required, and out of desperation, Nora signed her dying father's name on the binding document. Months later, Krogstad is about to lose his job at the bank when he discovers Nora's secret. He uses this knowledge to blackmail her and her husband. When the news of the contract and Nora's forgery reaches Torvald, he is infuriated with his wife, and fearful of the damage her actions will do to his reputation. It is not until Krogstad, convinced by Mrs. Linde, a friend of Nora and Krogstad's former flame, takes back his threat to reveal Nora's secret, that Torvald offers to "forgive and forget."

However the damage has been done. Nora finally realizes the true nature of her husband and the power of her own free will, and leaves her husband and her family behind.

Throughout the play, Nora is manipulated by other's expectations. The supporting characters "puppeteer" her, pulling her through the narrative and manipulating her sense of herself and those around her. But Nora is not helpless. She is smart, even if she cannot fully recognize her potential. In the end, she is not afraid to do what she knows she has to do to get what she wants and needs.

The simple action of Nora Helmer sneaking a macaroon in the opening moments of the play is a metaphor for Nora's predicament and I wanted to deconstruct this simple act. Why does she sneak the macaroon? Why does she not want her husband to see her do it? What does this say about her character, her history, and the standards set upon her by men and greater society? She is caught between what she truly wants and the gendered rules that "propriety" prescribes for her. It prompted me to reflect on the expectations that women have set for themselves based upon the portrayal of both women and men in the media, especially in the second half of the twentieth century. It was from this place *Coffee & Biscuit* sprang. I imagined Nora Helmer as a 1950's housewife prancing about the stage with a wall of vintage television sets behind her. This initial vision became the foundation of the delicately constructed "glossy" reality on the stage that would come to life through highly specific movement, vocal, acting, and aesthetic choices.

In order to root what would be *Coffee & Biscuit* in the 1950's, I based my research on a text that inspired much of my creative work during my graduate studies:

Betty Friedan's "The Feminine Mystique." This book revolutionized the mid 20th century American woman's understanding of who she was as an individual, wife, and mother at a time when much of that identity was being lost in loads of laundry and piles of dishes. It is this same idea of identity, and the loss thereof, that permeates Henrik Ibsen's classic and controversial play, further inspiring my musing on *A Doll's House*.

In her article '*The Problem with No Name*': Rereading Friedan's "*The Feminine Mystique*," Rachel Bowlby explains that starting in the 1920's and continuing through the Second World War, women gained more mobility in society. They had the ability to pursue higher education and to secure jobs that decades earlier had only been accessible to men (Bowlby 62). However, when the Second World War ended, thousands of men returned to the United States, hungry for the security of jobs and the comforts of "home" and "housewife." And with that, the population of the American middle class exploded.

Advertisers charged at the opportunity to target the bourgeoisie by fashioning established prescriptions of gendered expectations into an aesthetic of suburban marital bliss, complete with a shining new refrigerator and washing machine! Television advertisements such as the 1957 Swiss Creme Sandwich Commercial feature a picture perfect family, with a mom in an apron, two swell kids, and a father on his way home from work, singing delightedly in praise of the product. Although hyper-stylized, this commercial, and countless others, reinforced the idea of what a "perfect home" should look like. These portrayals in advertising corresponded directly with this depiction of the Nuclear Family, and more specifically, the

housewife, on mid 20th century television programming and magazine style television shows, such as *The Betty White Show* and Arlene Francis's *Home*.

A set of rules of womanhood that Friedan refers to as the “feminine mystique” began to seep into American life by way of this programming, defining an identity and reinforcing a set construction of gender roles. The American woman became a puppet, for as [See RESEARCH & INFLUENCES: Image 1 & Image 2] Friedan writes, “in the logic of the feminine mystique,... such a woman [under it's influence]... has no wishes of her own, who defines herself only as wife and mother.” (116). She is subject to expectations and standards set for her by others.

This assemblage of ideas inspired me to choose *A Doll's House*, and a stylized form of performance featuring puppetry as a vehicle to explore the construction of gender roles and the so-called “plight of the housewife.”

Part 2: The Creation Process: Writing & Development

As I began to adapt Ibsen's play, I realized the immensity of the challenge I had taken on. When working with such a classic piece of literature, one feels obligated to honor the original story both in its narrative intricacies and its complex characters. Meanwhile I was given a specific time limit and my goal was to re-envision Ibsen's play in an exploration of voice, movement, theory, and visual storytelling. Still, my first draft was nothing more and nothing less than an adaptation of Ibsen's *A Doll's House*, set in the 1950's, with puppets.

Under the guidance of Dr. Faedra C. Carpenter, Professor Leslie Felbain, and Professor Walter Dallas, I was able to move past this point by clarifying what I wanted to convey with my adaptation on *A Doll's House*, especially in relation to the use of multimedia, puppets, and stylized physicality in association with 1950's consumerism and twentieth century feminist thought.

I changed the names of all of my characters, except Nora, from the original Norwegian names to 1950's appropriate names with similar meanings, allowing the play to begin to stand on its own. Torvald (meaning "Thor's Ruler") became Harold ("leader of the army"), Nils ("victory of the people") Krogstad became Carl ("man", "warrior"), Christine (meaning "Christian") Linde became Betty (from Elisabeth meaning "my God is an oath") Lynn, and Doctor Rank became Doctor Smith. In addition, I titled the piece *Coffee & Biscuit*, referencing Harold's (Torvald's) constant need to be fussed over and fed. It was at this point that the play that I was writing began to emerge as a variation on *A Doll's House* because it presented a twisted perspective on Ibsen's narrative.

The “media’s voice”, a series of voiceovers and video clips that played at particular times in *Coffee & Biscuit*, was to be activated in the form of a pseudo 50’s talk show modeled after *The Betty White Show* entitled *Lunchtime with Lily*. A decision was then made to, instead, use original footage from the decade in order to authenticate the media’s message that challenges Nora in the *Coffee & Biscuit*. Collaborating with video designer Andrew Cohen and video programmer Jeff Wood, clips were assembled from 50’s television shows *Life with Elizabeth*, *I Married Joan*, *Leave it to Beaver*, and *I Love Lucy*, as well as original commercials from Nabisco, Ritz Crackers, and Gillette Razors in order to validate the influences.

In addition to using 1950’s media, I was also committed to using puppets in *Coffee & Biscuit* to highlight how Ibsen’s characters constantly manipulate each other, crossing social and class lines. Ibsen assigns each character a traditional gender and social class: Torvald as Bank Manager and breadwinner, Dr. Rank as older gentleman and doctor, Krogstad as a disreputable bank employee, Mrs. Linde as widow in need, and Nora as homemaker. Yet each one breaks out of his or her caste in order to get what he or she needs from the other. Take for instance Nora: Torvald sees her as his plaything, fragile and useless. Little does he realize that it is she who has the control in the house; it is she who acquired the money to get him the medical help he needed when he was indisposed. Nora knows how to get what she wants from her husband, and other men, whether it be their trust, money, or “love.”

Another instance of a character breaking out of his social sphere in terms of society’s prevailed guidelines is Krogstad. Krogstad works under Torvald at the bank, but he utilizes his contract with Nora as an opportunity to gain power over her

and her husband. By wielding their power, each character enlivens his fellow characters, igniting the play's action, and "puppeteering" each other.

Penny Francies', co-founder of the Puppet Centre Trust and Honorary Fellow of the Central School of Speech and Drama in London, states, "the term 'puppetry' denotes the act of bringing to imagined life inert figures and forms (representational or abstract) ..." (5). Choosing to integrate puppetry into the piece animated Ibsen's characters in a new way, and, with that, facilitated that the majority of the action occur in Nora's daydream. This choice clarified why the puppets existed in the world of the play, and their relationships to the puppeteers and to Nora. The absurdity of their appearance and their heightened characters is grounded in Nora's subconscious, as opposed to reality. Her mind brings these characters to life, conjuring up distorted figments of her memory in the form of puppets. Building the puppets myself created a deeply rooted connection that influenced my interaction with them on the stage. In addition, the presence of the puppeteers, dressed in costumes that mirror that of the puppets, refers to Nora's actual memory of the characters in her real life.

By choosing to place the majority of the story within a dream, *Coffee & Biscuit* was freed from the obligations of realism as characteristic of Ibsen's original script. As a result, it was given the license to fully embrace a mode of stylized physicality, utilizing movement and spatial relationships that allowed the action of the play to float in and between reality and the surreality of the 1950's "perfect life."

As the script developed I began to incorporate more dynamic moments of physicality, with specific moments choreographed in the stage directions such as:

TORVALD

Nora.

NORA freezes.

My little lark. My little darling.

NORA looks up. Her big doll eyes freeze.

My baby doll.

SHE starts rapidly eating the cookies and sweeping them under her skirt.

Dearest?

TORVALD stands up.

HE freezes. Turns around, moving slowly, stylized. NORA, in unison, moves to face her husband, TORVALD. The second before their eyes meet, we hear a door open. TORVALD steps forward as if opening a door, the hand of the puppet extending-growing/lengthening with the movement. He steps through the door and the arm shortens again. His head sharply turns the final inch toward his wife. She swallows the last bit of cookie, and takes out a stick of gum (check accuracy), and seductively places it in her mouth.]

Coffee & Biscuit- Draft 1 (p2) (8/6/12)

This use of physicality as articulated in the stage directions above was an essential part of the artistic vision for *Coffee & Biscuit*, but appeared only in limited instances in the first draft of the script, as demonstrated above. My next step was to incorporate a vocabulary of stylized movement inspired by the physicality used in 1950's commercials and in classical ballet, thus intensifying the "glossy" quality of the world as mentioned in *Part 1*.

Torvald refers to Nora as a "bird" and a "squirrel," among other titles. This choice, as well as her husband's request of Nora to dance at the Christmas party, indicate that Ibsen wrote Nora as a lithe character. Following Ibsen's lead, I decided to have Nora in *Coffee & Biscuit* be a former ballet dancer. Publically, she is a graceful complacent angel, dancing around everyone. But privately, she is strong willed and stubborn and has the control and discipline characteristic of the profession.

Nora's profession as a dancer during the war was also utilized as context for Nora's background as a prostitute in this variation, and referenced the Victorian reputation of the "ballerina" as a woman of ill morals. Dance history scholar, Alexandra Carter explains in her book *Dance and Dancers in the Edwardian Music Hall Ballet* that "the meaning ascribed to her roles, her costume, to her very participation in an overt display of the female body for public consumption... had a resonance more potent during the Victorian period than in any other,," even if the "the professional working ethos of the ballet would appear to over-ride if not preclude their endorsement of the erotic nature of their performance" (124). This play on the Victorian perspective in *Coffee & Biscuit* paid homage to the world in which Ibsen wrote, and gave Nora, in this production, an additional challenge to fight against as she moved through the narrative.

Through the writing and rehearsal process, *Coffee & Biscuit* developed into a melding of a 1950's aesthetics with cartoon like puppetry and stylized physicality grounded in 20th century feminist theory. What resulted on the stage was further invigorated by the collaboration between myself, the co-director, the cast, and the designers.

Part 3: Collaboration

Collaboration in the Rehearsal Room

As a director, it is of utmost importance to me that the rehearsal room is a safe space in which all artists are encouraged to take risks and make bold choices. In order to maintain this sensibility in the room, all collaborators must be dedicated to the over-arching artistic vision.

Emily Jane Warheit, a Ph.D. candidate in Theatre and Performance Studies at the University of Maryland, joined this project as a collaborating director, serving as an outside directorial and dramaturgical eye. From the beginning, Emily had a strong understanding and commitment to the dark and whimsical aesthetic, stylized physicality, and feminist implications of the piece. In addition, she was devoted to the artistic vision and grasped the importance of creating a well-orchestrated theatrical performance.

Before the rehearsal process began, Emily and I discussed the rehearsal room dynamic as co-collaborators and were able to proceed forward with an open dialogue regarding both the text and action of the show. As a performer/director, I was faced with the challenges of directing both myself and my fellow actors and honoring the artistic vision for the play. It was during this process that Emily was invaluable, offering reflections and suggestions. The knowledge that Emily was in strong alignment with the performance style allowed me to let go of the writer/director self, and fully embrace the performer self.

The assistant director on the show, Olivia Brann, also served as an indispensable resource throughout this process. Olivia's experience as a puppeteer

and performer prepared her to successfully work one on one with the actors, developing with them both their characters and their puppeteering skills. Olivia worked with each actor on physicality and focus, and assisted on the development of the movement vocabulary.

Both Emily and Olivia, along with the stage managers Robert Hunter and Dwight Townsend Gray, provided a strong support system that helped maintain a rehearsal environment centered on collaboration. As a director I believe that by giving the actors the opportunity to make discoveries about their own characters, back stories, and physicalities empowers them with the freedom to play when performing, an essential asset when working with puppets. Through empowered engagement, the actors develop ownership of the product.

Collaboration with Designers

As a visual person, I entered the thesis development process with a strong design concept supported by visual research rooted in both 1950's kitsch and contemporary steampunk. 1950's kitsch is characterized by bold shapes and patterns and saturated pastel colors. Visually, this style can be found best illustrated in mid-20th Century advertisements and television shows centered around the home and homelife [See RESEARCH & INFLUENCES: Image 1-2]. In aesthetic contrast, steampunk is characterized by the use of coppers, gold, and dark neutrals in its hyper-stylized gadgetry and described as the cross section between Victorian and SciFi. [See RESEARCH & IMAGES: Image 3] My choice to use these two genres as visual

cues to my designers expressed to them my desire to create a world on stage that floated between a 1950's sitcom drenched in Technicolor and a dark surreality.

In order to paint this world on stage, I spoke to the Scenic Designer Andrew Cohen about creating a wall that held a number of vintage TV sets playing the videos laid out in the script. The monotone grey “shelving” sculptural wall [See APPENDIX 1: Image 18-19] was animated when the television sets held within them came alive with the vintage programming. The wall, the television sets, and the messages that they carried became a fragment of the “real world” painted in grey, monotone, and permanently sculpted in the crevices of Nora’s mind.

Rebecca DeLapp designed costumes for both the actors and the puppets [See APPENDIX 1: Image 20-22] [See APPENDIX 2: Image 23-31] that amplified the life of each of the characters. Nora wears a bold red dress with a red crinoline, making her by far the brightest object on stage in the opening sequence. She continues in this outfit for the majority of the dream, and finds herself at home in the brightly colored world created by her mind. In addition, Nora wears a corset in reference to the Victorian origins of the play. This corset also acts as a tool of Nora’s physical manifestation as a puppet, with strings that the puppeteers, or rather, her subconscious, manipulate.

Nora is finally released from her corset when she declares that she is “ready to wake up now” in Vignette 10. The puppeteers strip her down to her underwear. Here she is the most vulnerable. It is not until Nora fully recognizes embraces her power over her situation, swearing to Carl that she will give her husband the letter, is she clothed again. This time she wears a delicate white dress and a pair of pointe shoes,

and the audience sees her dance for the first time. It is in the dance that Nora finds an absolution from her sins, and with that, empowerment. Yet, she is still bound to the rules of the dream; she still wears the same red crinoline as before underneath the white dress. It is only after she finishes dancing and ultimately confronts all of the figments of her dream, embodiments of her past and present, that all of the televisions except one are shut off, and the lights return to their beginning stasis. The dream is over.

Lighting designer Andrew Kauffman illuminated *Coffee & Biscuit* in a way that constantly indicates the shift in Nora's state of mind from reality to dream, good to bad, and light to dark. [See APPENDIX 2: Image 23-31] The opening scene, which takes place in reality, has a simple evening look. The lighting warps and transforms when Nora's imagination flies off on her, in the form of two small birds stealing the contract she is about to sign. Shadows become richer, and the lighting rosier, brightening the colors already on the stage. Andrew's lighting created a visual landscape for Nora's imagination, while composer Jay Spriggs and Sound Designer Jeffrey Dorfman created a complex oral landscape for *Coffee & Biscuit*.

Jay's compositions were inspired by "Steampunk opera", characterized by highly complex, electronic melodies, and 1950's instrumental music, and emerged out of discussions regarding the text and storytelling of the piece. Jay worked with me to orchestrate a soundtrack that would enhance the mood in particular scenes, setting a tempo for the actors to play with and against in their scenes, as well as meld transitions, and ultimately, transform the space from reality to dream, and back again.

Sound designer Jeffrey Dorfman also provided sound cues that further established the soundscape of Nora's dream world. One of the most important elements of the sound design was a series of voiceovers instructing Nora how to be a proper wife created in collaboration with assistant director, Olivia Brann.

As a theatre artist, working with the designers and co-directors in the process of developing *Coffee & Biscuit* revealed to me the details in my own writing that inspired other artists. It was in these collaborative conversations that I discovered a wealth of theatrical metaphors that bridged Ibsen's original play with Friedan's text, enriching the process, production, and performance.

Part 4: The Future of *Coffee & Biscuit*

A play is never done being written. It always has a place to go. There is always more of a story to be told. As I move forward with this piece, I plan to delve deeper into each of the character's stories, and construct moments in which Nora floats between daydream, the past, and the present. The challenge that comes along with this is clarifying the rules of each of these worlds.

In addition, through further dramaturgical development, I will strengthen the motif of the birds textually, conceptually, and physically throughout the play. The bird puppets have the potential of being catalysts, guiding Nora through the dream and pulling the strings of her corset as she progresses through the story. A more developed use of the birds will also open up new scenic design possibilities. Ideally, the play will be performed in a rounded thrust whose walls encapsulate the space much as a birdcage does.

In addition to exploring the bird motif in *Coffee & Biscuit*, I intend to weave ballet further into my storytelling. How can Nora's dancing move this story along? When does Nora dance? Why does she dance? How does the sensuality of her former profession as a prostitute wind its way into her classical dance? When is it prominent and when is it resisted? Through intense rehearsals and potential restructuring the play, in collaboration with a dramaturg, I hope to explore these questions.

Once these changes are made, I plan on giving *Coffee & Biscuit* a future beyond the University of Maryland, College Park. In the next several months, I plan

to submit proposal packets to a number of New York experimental theatre venues, one of which is HERE Arts Center. HERE Arts Center is recognized itself as “a destination for audiences who are passionate about ground-breaking contemporary work and the creative process behind it.” The audience it pulls in is “ethnically diverse, urban 20-40 something’s...” who are looking to view work that is “challenging and alternative”, and still within their budget. HERE Arts Center also hosts the Dream Music Program, directed by puppeteer Basil Twist, which provides opportunities for new puppetry work to be mentored and presented in one of New York’s most reputable experimental venues. All of these things draw me to this space as an ideal venue for a future production of *Coffee & Biscuit*.

I am also writing a “tour ready” version. In order to do this, I plan on adapting *Coffee & Biscuit* into a one-woman performance piece. This version will be a further meditation on how we impose controls, pressures, ideas, and expectations on ourselves, deepening and expanding upon the metaphors that already permeate *Coffee & Biscuit*.

Coffee & Biscuit intimately touches on the truths of how we perceive ourselves. This play, as a variation on Henrik Ibsen’s *A Doll’s House*, has the ability to unearth a deeper understanding of how gender roles are perpetuated in society, and our own awareness of them. As an experiment in adaptation and visual/physical storytelling this play takes the audience on a ride, challenging and enchanting them. Yet, it is not done. There is more to be told.

Coffee & Biscuit Rehearsal Script

Coffee & Biscuit premiered as part of the M.F.A. in Performance Festival of New Works on February 15th, 2013 at the Clarice Smith Performing Arts Center at the University of Maryland, College Park.

Production Team:

Writer: Teresa Bayer

Director: Teresa Bayer

Co-Director: Emily Jane Warheit

Assistant Director: Olivia Brann

Stage Manager: Robert Hunter

Assistant Stage Manager: Dwight Townsend-Gray

Composer: Jay Spriggs

Scenic & Video Design: Andrew Cohen

Costume Design: Rebecca DeLapp

Lighting Design: Andrew Kaufman

Sound Design: Jeffrey Dorfman

Projections Programmer: Jeff Woods

Production Assistant: Helen Bayer

Cast:

Nora: Teresa Bayer

Harold: Joe Graf

Betty Lynn: Hillary Templeton

Carl: Matthew Strote

Dr. Smith: Martin Thompson

Male Understudy: Tyler Angier

Female Understudy: Olivia Brann

Setting:

Nora & Harold's House in White Plains, NY and a place that resembles but is not quite Nora & Harold's House in White Plains, NY. Early 1950's.

VIGNETTE 1

A TV is on. The channel changes a few times. We see clips of commercials, bits of TV shows, chunks of theme song, etc.

Over the course of this, the lights rise on NORA at Harold's desk. She is eating a macaron. There is a vacuum nearby, plugged in. She looks at it occasionally- actively and purposely avoiding the housework she has to do.

NORA

The phone rings. NORA runs to adjust the volume on the TV.

Oh yes- put him through!

Oh! Doctor Smith! I'm so glad you called- no, no I'm not busy. I should have the money for the trip by the end of the week, and when that's settled, Harry and I will catch the next train down to Florida. Oh, thank you for making the arrangements..

He's... not so good- Awful night terrors, fevers. I can't stand to see
HAROLD wanders in, wrapped in a blanket, looking extremely ill.
 him this way. This- is not the man I married, Doctor.

HAROLD

Nora- who are you speaking to.

NORA

The doctor, Harry. What are you doing up? Darling, go back to bed. Rest.

HAROLD

But I wanted a biscuit, Nora.

NORA

I will get you a biscuit, dear. Now go rest.

HE slowly shuffles back offstage.

Sorry, Doctor. thank you for speaking with the Bank about the time off. I hope they have the job when we get back.

Yes. Yes. Oh no, it is my pleasure.

Yes. Thank you. I'll let you know the exact date as soon as I can.

She reads the contract on her desk. SHE picks up the phone, and calls.

NORA

Hello Operator, Carl Stevens, please.

Pause

Oh- oh Hello Carl- No- Harold is not doing better. I'm going to get you the contract today-... A cosigner? You hadn't said anything about a cosigner... I- My father will sign it.. Yes-

And the money? That soon? Oh Carl, that would be... wonderful! Thank you.

Yes- Thank you.. Again.

SHE hangs up the phone. SHE readjusts herself.

NORA

Father won't sign. There is no way. But- I

She picks up her pen and is about to sign. She places the pen down again. She goes to turn on the volume on the TV-there is a commercial for Gillette razors- with Sharpie the Parrot.

She returns to her desk.

NORA takes a sip of tea and plays with her pen, anxiously. She puts it down. With that the commercial gets louder and begins to appear on every TV. It begins to intercut in and out. Music begins. The reception grows fuzzy and turns into static. Several bird puppets appear out of the darkness. Nora sees them. The bird grabs the contract and flies off.

VIGNETTE 2

SHE realizes what has happened and goes to chase the bird offstage but the lights start flickering, the music intensifies, and, disoriented, hands have grabbed her corset strings, and they unravel, suspending NORA, stopping her from running, pulling at her. SHE now moves in slow motion. And, slowly, falls. As this happens, the lights dim and a few of the TV's flicker on, some playing white noise, some playing "Life with Elizabeth," others "I Married Joa"n, etc. Mixed in is the sound of the white noise, on the speakers we sometimes here disembodied bits of commercials. Suddenly things calm, and an episode of "The Betty White Show" starts playing on all of the screens. There is no sound. HAROLD puppet enters and is eating a biscuit. HE notices NORA on the floor. He looks at her. Finishes it.

VIGNETTE 3

HAROLD

Nora-

We have now entered the world of NORA's mind. The lights help indicate this shift.

Nora, my bird. What are you doing on the floor?

NORA

SHE looks at HAROLD with confusion.

I-

Harry- is that you?

SHE looks around, blinks; there is a nervous energy about her (which is to be expected- she did just enter her imagination). Things are not familiar.

HAROLD

That's a silly question, darling.
What are you doing on the floor?

NORA

What am I- Oh, I am on the floor. Goodness. Harold- what's going on?

HAROLD

HE reaches for her to help her up.
Have you any more of those biscuits?

NORA

Biscuits? Harold- Answer my question.
A phone rings offstage- the sound is a bit disembodied.

HAROLD

The bank!!!
HAROLD runs off stage, frantic to go answer the phone.
The TV turns on again, and begins playing episodes. She goes to turn it off, but then another one turns on. She goes to turn that off. Another one. Another one. Another one. Then several are on at once and she backs up.

A soothing 50's sound plays underneath. The sound itself is disembodied, coming from all around her, as opposed to the TV. The TV's themselves flicker back and forth between clips and static. Each playing different channels, including educational shows.

VOICEOVER

Have a cocktail waiting.
Do not complain if he is running late.
Cook what he wants for dinner.
It has been quite a long day.
Keep your house tidy. A tidy house is a peaceful house.
Is your house tidy?

This catches her off guard.

One hand grabs onto one of Nora's corset ribbon, and another hand to another. They pull her tightly.

VIGNETTE 4

They let go, she lands on the floor, and a vacuum cleaner- the same one as before rolls out. SHE looks at it. SHE begins to walk away from it. The vacuum follows her. SHE turns around and looks at it, and it stops. This happens a few times. SHE reaches the end of the stage and shopping bags are placed in the corner of the stage. NORA doesn't see this happen.. HAROLD comes back out after the phone call. As soon as he enters the space she freezes. She senses his presence.

HAROLD

You know you shouldn't be vacuuming while I'm on the phone, darling. I can't hear a thing.

SHE turns around and faces him

NORA

I wasn't, Harold. It- was following me.

HAROLD

Nonsense, my little lark.

Nora.

Nora is involved trying to figure out what is going on.

What do you have over there, my sweet?

It is now that she sees the shopping bags.

You went shopping I see.

NORA

Harry- how are you feeling- you look- .

HAROLD

My bumbling little **bird**. You're all flushed.

Touching her cheek.

And it is not just the sun burn- now what did you buy?

NORA

Sun burn?

HAROLD

From that Florida sun.

NORA

Florida.

The lighting begins to shift back to the real lighting. The puppet is lowered, and HAROLD stares at her, momentarily.

She touches her skin.

We went to Florida! And you're well.

We switch back to the fantasy lighting and the HAROLD puppet is raised again.

How was it- How are you-
It's a dream.

HAROLD

Better than ever.

Now stop avoiding the topic

Walks on over to the bags and starts digging through them.

What on earth did you buy this time?¹

NORA

A bell dings and a light shines on the bag. Digging in her bag to find out what she bought- because obviously she doesn't remember what her dream self bought. But she does know it was wonderful.

Well- some of it is a surprise- but-

Euphoric, orgasmic; as she digs.

HAROLD

Spending, spending, spending.

NORA

Oh hush

HAROLD

You like to spend every little penny.

As if talking to a little baby.

The lights brighten a bit, making the scene appear to be more Technicolor

But you don't know better. No, my birdy doesn't know any better.

NORA

We can spend a little bit here and there, it's Christmas and- you're
Back at the bank?

HAROLD

Manager, darling.

NORA

Manager! Of the Greater White Plains Bank? Oh, Harry, that's fantastic.

HAROLD

Did you expect any less.

NORA

Of course not, dear.

Oh honey, I want to decorate.

She begins digging through her shopping bag.

And I got- ornaments, and bubble lights, jell-o molds- and

He gives her a kiss on the cheek.

I want to make things nice for my hubby- you deserve it.

HAROLD

What would be nice is if you wouldn't spend my money-

The lights flicker, NORA's face changes. The TV turns on.

NORA

Your money? If it wasn't for me-

VOICEOVER

Your husband is always right.

NORA

But he isn't.

HAROLD

And I am always right. Right about this; Right about the new managerial structure at the bank- getting rid of those unnecessary jobs- less people to pay, more money in our pockets. And I am planning to-

NORA

Always right- yes- but it's all planned- calculated.

HAROLD

Logical.

NORA

Thinking back to signing, the bird flutters in.

It isn't... bad to act on whims, Harryy.

The bookkeeper, while we were in Florida. That worked out well- that was... just a whim.

HAROLD

Most useful thing you've ever done, finding that man, considering how good you are at **spending money**.

This hurts NORA. She begins to sulk.

Oh no, my bird. Don't sulk. .

HE looks at his wife as she walks away and the puppeteer reaches into his pocket and pulls out some money, placing it in the puppets hand.

You are not attractive with that dreadful face.

Here, here.

SHE springs back to life and bounces to her husband. He puts each piece of money in her hand, counting it out. SHE kisses him. HE watches her fingers.
Birdie?

NORA looks up.

Coffee? And a Lorna Doone from Nabisco ?

TV turns on. A Nabisco commercial plays.

NORA

In a second, darling

VOICEOVER

Your husband is a busy man, the least you can do is do what he asks when he asks it.

NORA

SHE looks around for a second. Snap back.

Fine.

She gives a small flourish (that of a dancer)

HAROLD

A note plays.

You will dance at the party.

NORA

But it's been ages, Harry, not since... before we were married-

HAROLD

You will dance for me.

The phone rings again.

The bank!

HAROLD swiftly exits.

Don't forget, Nora- coffee and biscuit. Oh and a cup for the Doctor. He should be headed over soon.

NORA

Dr. Smith...

Lights dim. Puppeteers bring her tea pot, tea cup , and macaron. Just as she is about to eat the macaron- HAROLD calls:

HAROLD

And no biscuit for you, doll.

SHE freezes. White noise plays on all of the TV's. The biscuit falls.

You have to watch that waistline.

VIGNETTE 5:

NORA blinks. Stares forward. She begins to stuff her face with macarons, eating them rapidly, violently.

Two of the “puppeteers” come out and tighten her corset, causing her to stop and realize what has happened. When she snaps back, she puts the finishing touches on her husband’s snack. And then, the doorbell rings, startling her.

NORA

The lights flicker back to the realistic lighting, maybe we see the real Harold for a second.

Harold--

The doorbell rings one more time. Taking NORA back into her imagination.

HAROLD

Loud, angry, and seemingly out of character- on the loud speaker-
Will someone get the goddamn door?!?!
With that NORA crumbles the cookies in her hand.

BETTY puppet appears out of the dark.

BETTY

Nora?

NORA

Facing forward.

Yes.

A vacuum is handed to her. This surprises her. SHE is resistant at first, but concedes and vacuums.

SHE turns around to face Betty Lynn. BETTY steps forward towards the front of the stage and NORA watches her. The lights flicker between real and unreal. When NORA speaks, SHE is unsure, trying to realize where she is and why she is there.

BETTY

Nora, sweetheart?

NORA

Yes-

BETTY

Were you vacuuming-

NORA

Was I?

SHE drops the vacuum and it is caught by a puppeteer’s hand who returns it offstage.

Still not registering that she is a dream.

Nora.
Yes?

BETTY

Oh dear... you- don't remember me.

NORA

Well. I. Of course I-....

Suddenly-

Betty Lynn! Oh Betty!

Realizing what BETTY's return implies.

I'm such a silly goose sometimes! Betty!

NORA

But why are you...

SHE reaches out to touch BETTY's real face.

BETTY

Darling. Your face looks like it got stuck in a storm drain.

As if she were saying What dreadful thing are you thinking about?.

Realizing the expression she has made, NORA snaps out of it.

NORA

BETTY- you look lovely- It's been ages. Oh my Lord, - Take off your coat- you must be boiling. Give it here.

SHE grabs it off of her friend and throws it offstage... A fifties style couch rolls on almost violently- swiftly- controlled by puppeteers.

BETTY

...Thank you.

NORA

Just sit your pretty little bum

Oh darling- how long has it been?

BETTY

Opens her mouth to speak.

NORA

NORA interrupts.

You must be parched- You must have some tea-

From behind the couch we see puppet hands offering her different cups of tea, all at once.

BETTY

Nora- if you have coffee.

NORA

All the teas drop to the ground.

Oh. Coffee. YES!

Cream and sugar? Macarons?

BETTY

Black. And no-

NORA

You look dreadfully thin. Here, here.

SHE pulls macarons out of her pocket. A plate is handed to her and a cup of coffee as well.

BETTY

Oh.

Thank you.

NORA

My pleasure, darling!

And tea for me!

A cup of tea is handed to NORA. SHE takes a sip.

BETTY

Nora- I came by-

NORA

Betty dear-

BETTY

Nora- I wanted to speak to you about—

NORA

Wait- before- before you say anything, try the coffee, tell me what it tastes like-

BETTY

The coffee is tasted.

Like black coffee.

NORA

My tea tastes like...It tastes Technicolor...

Oh don't look at me like that, Betty. It's just... dreams are funny things?

BETTY

Dreams?

NORA

Like this one, darling.

You don't know why you have them until they're done, but being in them is full of wild sensations. Like the taste of the tea

She reaches for the macarons and bites one.

And macarons. Everything is just a little brighter. - and you here-

I don't know why you're here- but it's all for a reason-

Why could you be here, Betty? To remind me of my past mistakes? I don't need that now... that-

BETTY

Well, I'm here to ask you-

NORA

Why could you be here?

BETTY

Listen to me, Nora.

NORA

You're here to help me fix my dress?! For the party- yes- Oh Betty, you must help me- you were always so handy with the needle. Harry asked me to do some little dance-

Rolls eyes

Some little diddy and I haven't danced in AGES! Not since the war.

Oh you must come to the party- it will be so dull without you. And you can watch me make a fool out of myself.

BETTY

You don't mean-?

NORA

Gosh, no! Harry certainly does need to see that! Although, that was more entertaining than this is!

There is only so much *I Married Joan* a girl can handle, Lordy.

VOICEOVER

What can you do for your husband?

NORA

Did you hear that, Betty?

BETTY

Hear what, darling?

NORA

Oh.

Nothing. Just..

Two bird puppets flutter in. They land on Nora's hand. SHE is silent for a moment. SHE looks at the birds. One gets up and flies to BETTY's hand. NORA continues staring.

BETTY

Nora, dear- please- listen

As you might know- Larry- passed away-

NORA

I completely forgot You poor thing - a widow. And that DREADFUL obituary. . I can't even imagine

BETTY

Actually, Nora-

NORA

I don't know what I'd do if Harold died.

BETTY

You'd survive, Nora.

NORA

I can't-

BETTY

When Harry was at war- and your father was sick- you survived- on your own. With only yourself.

NORA

That's barely survival.

BETTY

You were independent.

NORA

Selling yourself for money is not independence.

BETTY

And this is?

NORA

Isn't it-?

BETTY

NORA makes a face.

Don't put on such a face, Nora. You were always so sensitive, which I still find amusing considering our prior profession...

NORA

No more of this- Harry might hear.

BETTY

But-

NORA

I never told him.

BETTY

Nora.

NORA

I was going to.

BETTY

You didn't? But-

NORA

Oh darling, he was sickly and pale when he came back. He'd babble in his sleep. I couldn't tell him-I was his little angel ballerina. If he had known about... If I had told him what I-

BETTY

We

NORA

He might have died right then if I had- he was such a blubbering mess when he came back home. I couldn't bare it.. Even the thought of it--

BETTY

We didn't do anything wrong. You know that

NORA

Harold would say otherwise.

BETTY

I'm glad I told that bastard of a husband of mine.

NORA

Betty.

BETTY

I am. It's not as though he cared.

There is silence between the two women. They stare at each other, and then both retreat. NORA picks up the plate of macarons and offers it to her friend

NORA

Macaron?

BETTY

Faye said you went to Florida. That sounds nice.

NORA

Yes- I had to take Harold... to St. Augustine. – He... needed the treatment and the doctors there... and the waters. It does work miracles.

BETTY

You had the means to do it.

NORA

Hardly. You know Harold hadn't been working for months.

BETTY

Did you start again?

NORA

Of course not!

BETTY

Oh pish-
How did you pay for it...?

NORA

Handywork- knitting... I borrowed some.

BETTY

Borrowed? Lordy, what did Harold say about that?

NORA

Well, I told Harry that Daddy gave me the money. Which he didn't, of course, because then Daddy would have found out Harry was sick- and what a mess that would have been.

BETTY gives her a look.

NORA

I'm glad I did it. I'm glad we went. It means I'm not alone.
I don't want that.

Lights flicker

I don't think I want that. Betty... Betty- what's it like?

BETTY

Being alone?

NORA

Yes.

BETTY

Honestly.

The bird on NORA's shoulder tweets.

NORA

Please.

BETTY

It's great.

The bird tweets.

NORA

Oh-

The lights dim a bit and focus on NORA and the bird. Quiet music starts. The bird, who has the contract in her claws, releases said contract. She tweets. TWEET TWEET. Out of the darkness a pen is given to NORA.

VOICEOVER

Take responsibility for-

The BIRDS fly off.

NORA

Defiant

Well-

I got Harry the best care money could buy.

And he came back and took over the bank as I had expected him to.

It was all me-All me. He was useless.

To herself

Useless.

Snapping back

And now he's well.

BETTY

Really?

NORA

Yes. Why?

BETTY

I mean a doctor arrived at the same time I did.

NORA

Dr. Smith-

BETTY

I didn't catch his name-

NORA

He took special care of Harry in St. Augustine. And came up here with us. Says he would get good business in New York- the city is full of loons. Is he with Harold in his office?

BETTY

Yes- I believe so. Interesting man.

NORA

Yes, well- He comes to dinner three times a week, checks on Harry, speaks with me. Blind as a bat, but darling! -and loves my cooking- for some odd reason. It's funny to have a man as a friend- one who doesn't expect anything from you.

SHE reaches out her hands to BETTY.

Things are looking up.. This Christmas is going to be... a real Christmas. You must join us for the holidays if you're around. And if anything- come over tomorrow afternoon- we can cook and you can help me with my dress. I know it sounds awfully dull, but- I would just love someone... to speak to.

BETTY

... Well- I may be able to.

NORA

Come over tomorrow, or join us for the holidays- or both?

BETTY

Well- it depends... if I'm in town.

Darling-- I need a job. I can't go back to living like we did... That's why I'm here

NORA

If anyone understands I do-

BETTY

Faye told me that Harold had been made manager of the Greater White Plains Bank-
and

NORA

There might be a place at the bank for you.
I'll speak with Harry tonight!

BETTY

Thank-

NORA

Why wait. Harold. HAROLD!

VIGNETTE 6

DR. SMITH and HAROLD enter together, deep in conversation.

DR. SMITH

Dear Nora, you are the epitome of perfection today.

NORA

Oh Doctor Smith- I..

Blushing

Harry- You remember my ballet chum, BETTY!

HAROLD

You talk of so many things, sparrow . How could I possibly remember.

NORA

I just thought-

HAROLD

Noticing the macarons

Goddamn, what are those brightly colored monstrosities on that plate?

And where's my coffee? Nora- birdy-

Dr. SMITH extends his hand to BETTY

DR. SMITH

Pay him no mind, Miss-?

BETTY

Betty, just Betty.

DR. SMITH

What brings you into the city, "Just Betty"?

NORA

BETTY is about to speak, but NORA cuts her off
The poor girl is a widow.

DR. SMITH

I'm sorry to hear that, ma'am.

VOICEOVER

How to get what YOU need from your husband.
In order to make your home a perfect one!

NORA

NORA goes to get her husband's coffee.
She's lived upstate for quite a while... you know- and now that she's back the only person she KNOWS anywhere NEAR the city is me, so I must help her out.
Harry-

NORA realizes that this approach is not working.
She is much smarter than I am.

HAROLD

Clearly.

NORA

She cringes slightly.
And she wants more than anything to work under a brilliant man like you!! Is there an opening at the bank, maybe?

HAROLD.

I'll see what I can do- I don't think it will be a problem.

HE nods his head.

Look at the time, Nora! I need to run over to the bank before I get the Doctor to the station.

NORA

But your coffee, Harry, it's almost ready

HAROLD

Disregarding her.
Can't waste an ounce of time.

BETTY

Oh thank you!

HAROLD

Yes, yes. Doctor- let's go.

NORA

More coffee, Betty?

BETTY

I must be on my way, as well, darling! But I'll be by tomorrow- to help with the dress.

NORA

Lovely! All the best dear-

HAROLD

Now- I know a few appropriate positions I can recommend you for-
As BETTY and HAROLD speak, NORA pulls DR. SMITH aside.

NORA

Doctor- is Harry... alright? Is he doing well?
A flicker of lights.

DR. SMITH

Oh, yes Nora.

NORA

Because if he's not-

HAROLD

To BETTY

Now let's see- I do hope you have a pen and paper handy-

NORA

What's the point of all this?

DR. SMITH

It's just a friendly visit. Don't fret dear girl.

NORA

But this- what is the point of all this- this dream? Why are you here?

DR. SMITH

Patience.

HAROLD

Have that coffee and biscuit ready when I get back, Nora. Don't let it get cold.
 Come Doctor.

Lights out on HAROLD

DR. SMITH

I will see you soon, Nora.

Song plays, lights out on BETTY, HAROLD, and then DR. SMITH.

NORA

Doctor!

We hear the white noise of a TV set. The space is dimly illuminated.

VIGNETTE 7

CARL's appears. Two puppeteers watch. The following conversation should be had tenderly. CARL is not necessarily trying to hurt her.

CARL

Nora.

Surprised, she turns around.

NORA

Carl-

CARL

You've lost weight, Nora.

NORA

Maybe . Maybe I have.

CARL

Does Harold like that?

NORA

Please don't look at me that way, Carl.

CARL

I just remembered seeing you dance.

When was the last time you were on the stage, Nora?

NORA

Why are you here? You shouldn't be here.

CARL

Oh now look, you're all red.

NORA

I will have the next installment of the money I owe you within the week.

SHE walks over the wall of stuff where she goes to grab money from a box.
I've been saving-

NORA

Harold will be back any moment.

CARL

Secrets, Nora. You have so many little secrets.

NORA

In this house, please call me Mrs.

CARL

I think we are beyond all formalities.

NORA

Sir.

CARL

Why do you act like I'm the enemy. All I have done is help you. Then. Now. You needed money, and I gave it to you.

NORA

And I am eternally grateful!

CARL

I lent you the money upon your signing of a particular contract. Here.

NORA

Yes.

Proudly, confidently.

And I've been paying you back, weekly, Sir. Without fail. I won't have this week's payment in full until Friday, as we agreed. And I will *bring* it to you. You know, Harold. If he sees you here- he's in one of his moods. You know him. Please.

CARL

Your father co-signed the agreement, did he not?

The strings of the corset are lengthened, extended out and create a pattern across the space. A puppet bird flies in and perches.

NORA

Of course he did

CARL

Of course he did. I see it here.

NORA

What is the problem?

CARL

What day did he die.

NORA

Is this really necessary?

CARL looks at her, nudging her on

The 8th of September, this year.

CARL

8th of September? Well that's quite funny. He signed this on September 10th.

NORA

He- forgot to date it- and

CARL

Oh yes- you filled it in for him, the kind daughter that you are.

NORA

I didn't think it would be any trouble if I were to do that.

CARL

That's not the trouble- no, not at all.

The trouble lies in the signature.

NORA

My father's?

CARL

Yes, Nora.

NORA

Please.

CARL

You think I'm stupid, don't you?

NORA

No.

CARL

How much do you love your husband?

NORA

Pardon me.

CARL

What would your darling, weak little Harold-

NORA

How dare you-

CARL

What would Harold say if he knew that you had borrowed money?

NORA

He never needs to know that. Besides, you act like I committed some sort of crime- I saved my husband's life. There is nothing *dishonorable* in that. You-

CARL

You signed your father's name.

NORA

I- I don't know what you're talking about.

CARL

This is your handwriting, Nora.

NORA

I-

CARL

Did you father even see this paper?

NORA

He was on his deathbed!

CARL

You should have told me.

NORA

I couldn't chance it

CARL

You forged your father's name.

NORA

Does it matter- I'm paying you back!

CARL

Do you know the way your husband looks at me, Nora?

NORA

You have a reputation, Carl.

CARL

Doll- so do you.

NORA

Excuse me, sir. I'm going to have to ask you to leave.

A series of doors shut on the TV sets. NORA frees herself from the puppeteers pulling at her strings.

CARL

apologetically

I'm sorry. Nora- please. You're the only one who can help me.

NORA

I don't do that anymore, and I do not want my former profession discussed in this house. I will get you the money by Friday. Now- leave. You are not supposed to be in my head.

CARL

I don't care about the money, Nora.

NORA

Silence in the space.

What is it, then?

-CARL

Your husband looks at me with contempt every time I enter the office. Every time. And there is talk of shifts in the new year. And I need this job-- Nora. I cannot lose this job.

NORA

And what can I do!

CARL

I need you to put in a good word for me... with your husband.

NORA

I have no say.

CARL

Bat your eyelashes.

NORA

To herself. Flicker.
That can't be the only way.

CARL

You might have more power than you ever thought.
Use it.
I will keep your secret.
If you guarantee that the rumors aren't true- that I will have my job in the new year.
The lights change.

VIGNETTE 8

Suddenly silence. The bird tweets.

A TV turns on.

NORA hums, trying to remember a song that calms her. A puppeteer comes out and puts her apron on her, and ties it.

A doorbell rings.

BETTY enters on one side, and DR. SMITH on another when marked below.
[These two conversations, although happening at different times in reality, happen simultaneously on stage. The DR. SMITH convo is marked in yellow.
Double convo moments are highlighted in purple.]

NORA

Ding
I-
Come in.

DR. SMITH

Nora!

BETTY

My darling Nora, you look like you've seen a ghost.

NORA

Dr. Smith
Betty.

BETTY

Sweet girl. Have you considered taking some medication? I think it might- soothe you. Here I have some in my purse-

NORA

Are you alone, Betty?

BETTY

Yes, of course.

NORA

You're alone, Doctor?

HE nods his head yes and chuckles.

DR. SMITH

I see why your husband enjoys you so, Nora.

NORA

Well- he seems to.

DR. SMITH

He does.

Awkward silence.

NORA

Harold isn't home, doctor.

BETTY

Really, doll, I do have some pills here- they might make you relax a bit.

DR. SMITH

Harold- he's a good man, but very... self-absorbed.

NORA

Yes.

With a slight smile

He is.

NORA

Betty- I don't need pills.

BETTY

Judgey- judgey.

NORA

It is rather good you came over, Doctor. I need to speak with... someone...

DR. RANK

And I need to speak with you.

NORA

You do?

DR. RANK

I'm not doing well, Nora.

My age is catching up on me. I'm beyond useless as a doctor at this point.

BETTY

They make life a little more manageable.

Easing the pain, burrying the nightmares- on occasion.

NORA

I don't need to ease the pain.

To BETTY

I don't-

Betty... why are you here?

BETTY

You said you needed help getting ready for your party.

NORA

It's tomorrow already?

BETTY

Really, dear, are you feeling alright?

NORA

Doctor- What you did for Harry in St. Augustine- was extraordinary- and I can't imagine that you're not getting loads of business in the city.

DR. SMITH

Beyond useless, and

NORA

Nonsense.

DR. SMITH

near death.

NORA

Not believing him.

Doctor-

DR. SMITH

I am much worse off than most of my patients.
That's why I came to speak to you, Nora

BETTY

Where's your thread, darling?

NORA

The thread? Yes. Oh.

The puppeteers place a sewing box and gorgeous 50's style ballerina-like dress.

Right here, where I left it.

BETTY

Let me see the dress!

NORA picks it up and spins around.

Gorgeous. Absolutely beautiful. Just need to shorten that hem a tad. That won't take long at all!

NORA

Oh thank you!

BETTY

Will that Doctor be at the party?

NORA

Of course. Darling man, don't you think?

BETTY

He spoke very highly of you on the way to the station, yesterday.

DR. SMITH

This might be my last chance to tell you that you-

NORA

Is something in your eye, doctor?

BETTY

He thinks you're quite beautiful. He says you're cooking is

DR. SMITH

are a dream.

BETTY

Divine- He called you

BETTY & DR. SMITH

the perfect homemaker.

NORA

To herself.

But what if I don't want to be.

DR. SMITH

But you are a lot more than that.

NORA

I am- aren't I?

BETTY

That's trouble there.

NORA

The bird puppet finds a perch, sits and watches.

He's just a friend. He doesn't expect anything from me.

BETTY

Oh- but he does. The man is-

DR. SMITH

I'm-

DR. SMITH & BETTY

In love with you.

NORA

No, you can't be- Betty said it, but you... can't be-

DR. SMITH

Why do you think I left Florida and came up to this tundra of cement and concrete?!

NORA

Good business.

DR. SMITH

Harold calls you delicate.

NORA

Darling- that is the silliest thing I've ever heard!

BETTY

And you know how to use his weakness for you to your advantage, don't you? A little bit of money goes a long way. How did you work it out? Did you sleep with him when you got to Florida?

NORA

With the Doctor?

BETTY

Did he pay you before hand?

NORA

I didn't- I couldn't have- Betty I didn't do that. I'm done with that.

BETTY

How did you get the money, Nora? How could YOU have possibly gotten that money?

NORA

I borrowed it!
And I am paying it back.

MRS. LINDE

How?

DR. SMITH is gone.

VOICEOVER

Have you ever felt lost?

TV's turn on.

Lost and alone?

Frustrated?

Angry?

NORA goes to turn of TV's, but they keep turning back on with similar excerpts.

By the end of this segment, they are all on, BETTY has disappeared, and NORA throws something. It breaks. Everything turns off. There is silence.

NORA

Yelling with flickering lights

I'm ready to be done now!

VIGNETTE 9

A soft, quite song begins to play. The vacuum cleaner is handed to NORA and she goes to vacuum the mess she has made. HAROLD appears. The following conversation is tender, and odd.

HAROLD

My sweet toy doll.

NORA

Harold, darling.

HAROLD

Where is my coffee and biscuit?

In the dark, someone hands NORA the coffee and biscuit. SHE crumbles the biscuit. Another biscuit is handed to her. SHE crumbles it. Another.

Another. The last one she just takes a bite out of it and hands it to HAROLD.

There is a bite taken out of my biscuit.

NORA

Harry.

HAROLD

You have to watch that waistline, my birdy.

NORA

Harold.

HAROLD

My pretty little sparrow.

No biscuits for you, my sweet.

NORA

Harold, listen.

HAROLD

Just seeds.

NORA

LISTEN!

HAROLD

Don't yell.

NORA

There is an employee at the bank- Carl. Do you know him?

HAROLD

Unfortunately.

NORA

He's a good man.
Very intelligent.

HAROLD

A reputation.

NORA

He is good at his job at the bank, though- isn't he?

HAROLD

How do you know him, Nora?

NORA

We met at... the company picnic

HAROLD

Not worth your time, sweetheart.

NORA

Why, Harry?

HAROLD

He forged a signature on a contract, a contract involving a lot of money.

NORA

And that makes him a bad person?

HAROLD

When working in a bank? When dealing with money? Yes.
His morals are a bit lax, as well.

NORA

What- what do you mean?

HAROLD

Rumor has it round the bank of his involvement with prostitutes in the past. I don't want a man like that working for me.

NORA

Harry- darling, I'm sure.. that's not true.

HAROLD

How little you know, twitter brain.
Luckily I won't have to deal with him much longer.

NORA

What?

HAROLD

I am removing him from the bank.

NORA

No Harold!!
You-

HAROLD

I can do whatever I damn well please, Nora.
It does not affect you.

NORA

But- I'm sure he needs this job. A man like that-

HAROLD

As does your friend Betty. I will be giving her his old position.

NORA

Oh- oh no!
Dear, can't you just poof- make another position-
don't fire him. Please.

HAROLD

I have already made up my mind, Nora.

NORA

NO!
Listen to me, goddamnit.

HAROLD is gone.

VIGNETTE 10

NORA sits right back down on the couch next to BETTY who is sewing away. BETTY speaks as if she is trying to get NORA's attention, and has been for a while.

BETTY

Nora.

NORA

Betty.

BETTY

Are you alright?

NORA

But you left- I don't want you here! I don't need you here!

BETTY

But I am helping you.

Showing her the dress.

NORA

The dress. Yes. The dress- But you had said-

BETTY

Sweetie-that was then, this is now- Remember this isn't quite real.

NORA

Right- yes. But you're here, aren't you?

BETTY

Yes, darling. Now, what is it?

NORA

Do you remember Carl?

BETTY

A good customer, loyal, clean.

SHE laughs

NORA

Yes. Well-

You know how he was generous to us... during the War. I ran into him at the Bank's company picnic. Not long after that- Harry got sick. And I needed money to take him down to St. Augustine.

BETTY

Old ways die hard.

NORA

Betty I just- borrowed money from him.

Her hands begin to shake.

I signed my father's name on a contract .

He's threatening to tell Harold- about the contract. And I fear that he might... also tell him about-

BETTY

You need tea, darling. And a macaron.

SHE goes to grab them. We hear them klink in her shaking hands.

NORA

I need to wake up.

BETTY

Drink your tea, dear.

VIGNETTE 11

We see hands undo NORA's dress, until she stands on the stage in her underwear.

Bubble lights flicker on a Christmas tree. NORA is now only in a corset and her underwear. MUSIC plays. HAROLD's voice is heard over a loud speaker. His voice booms, echoes.

NORA looks a bit like a doll.

HAROLD

My beautiful little bird. Dance for me.

NORA

I'll dance this evening, Harold.

CARL appears.

CARL

Dance for me, Nora.

NORA

Carl- what are you doing here. You're not supposed to be here

CARL

HE pulls out a pink slip.

NORA

Oh. Oh no.

HAROLD

I said dance for me, Nora.

NORA begins to move, but is not in control of her own body. Her limbs are stiff, as if a puppet

HAROLD

Why are you so feisty today.

CARL

I have the letter here. And it tells him everything.

NORA

No!

SHE tries to lurch at him but finds herself stuck in her dance.

CARL

Dance, little bird.

Harold would like that.

NORA

How much do you want? I can get it for you. I can get you however much you want.

Just give me a day- two days at the most.

How do you want me... to pay you?

CARL

Don't you understand?

HAROLD

Dance my darling.

CARL

Consider the possibility, Nora. Maybe it's not all about you. Maybe I am doing this for myself? I need my job back, Nora. And you have all the control.

NORA

HAROLD!

CARL

I am dirt in this town. You and your little friend, Betty. You respected me once.

And now *I'm* the dirt under your feet. I was supposed to be a hero- But I was only yours, because I gave you what you needed, Nora. Money. And now I need you. I need you, Nora, like you needed me. I need you to save me.

Get me my job back. That's all I want.

Or I will tell your husband the truth.

He pulls out an envelope addressed to HAROLD.

It's all here. All of your secrets.

NORA

What if I said alright?

SHE is suspended, her arms raised.

CARL

You will get me my job back?

NORA

If I could, what would happen?

CARL

This would all be done.

NORA

I could wake up?

CARL

That part is up to you, Nora.

NORA

And if I say no, if I refuse?

CARL

Don't you want this to be over? If I give this to him, it will all be over.

NORA

Let me give it to him. He loves me and it won't matter, but let me do it. Please.

CARL

I don't trust you, Nora.

NORA

I swear I'll do it.

CARL

When?

NORA

After the party.

CARL

Now.

NORA

Tonight. Give it to me.

CARL hands her the letter. HE leaves

HAROLD

voiceover

Dance, my bird.

The music crescendos. And the lights pan from the ground up to the sky- the heavens.

Dance for me now, I said.

Lights shift.

SHE dances like a doll.

VIGNETTE 12

The hands come out, and begin to dress NORA in her party dress, and her pointe shoes. SHE cooperates with them, moving and responding to each touch. A little bird flies across the stage.

And with that, she is done getting dressed. NORA's pointe shoes are tied. And she dances, without abandon, to the rhythmic music of a 50's cocktail party, the clink of glasses, the sound of party laughter, until she falls, and there is silence except for her heavy breathing. HAROLD leans down, gives his wife a kiss on the cheek.

VIGNETTE 13

HE begins to slowly take off her shoes, untying them. HE grabs a pillow and places it under her head. THIS is the most tender we have seen HAROLD. SHE holds the letter in her hand and he takes it from her.

HAROLD

Sweet cherub. Sweet, sweet songbird.

DR. SMITH enters, as does BETTY downstage. HAROLD does not see them. HE kisses his wife on the cheek and then opens the piece of paper addressed to him.

DR. SMITH

Nora.

I love you. And I want to take care of you.

NORA

You're not supposed to, Doctor.

DR. SMITH

You are a doll,

BETTY

We will never escape our past, Nora.

DR. SMITH

and doll's are supposed to be taken care of.

NORA

But I don't need to be.

BETTY

We didn't do anything wrong.

TV's turn on... Intercut with static

VOICEOVER

The perfect wife never does anything disagreeable.

NORA

But what if I want to be disagreeable?

CARL enters quietly.

VOICEOVER

The perfect wife will always have a cocktail ready for her husband when he comes home from work.

HAROLD

Shaking

Nora.

VOICEOVER

She will keep the house neat, spending time each day.

NORA

I-

HAROLD

You imbecile. Do you know what this says?

He reads the letter

VOICEOVER

She understands that sometimes her man may be running late, and she does not nag him.

CARL

Your wife, Nora has fooled you.

NORA

You will not have to save me.

CARL

I met Nora when I returned back from Europe, early because of injury. She was young, broke, and needed me.

NORA

I needed no one.

HAROLD

She needed me.

CARL

She needed the money that I had. Because she was

HAROLD

-weak, frail, and

CARL

I needed her love.

And we exchanged what we needed from each other. And then, years later, she needed me again. She needed my money again, but not my love. You had her love. And you took the only thing I had left- my job.

Nora-

NORA

You do not need to save me.

CARL

She signed

HAROLD

-her father's name on a contract... to borrow money.
Do you have any idea what you have done?

NORA

I saved you.

HAROLD

You assanine slut.

VOICEOVER

She listens to her husband, and doesn't speak too much.

HAROLD

You feeble-minded whore.

VOICEOVER

She makes excellent cupcakes.

HAROLD

If I had known-

VOICEOVER

And buttercream icing.

HAROLD

The time I have wasted.
My reputation-

NORA

Harold. Who cares about your reputation?!

HAROLD

How dare you-

NORA

Listen to me!

All the video goes to static.

The puppeteer lowers and raises his puppet throughout the following monologue. HAROLD listens intently to NORA.

Right now, at home, you're lying in bed. Moving in fits, tossing, turning- your mind is running off on you. You say that you don't have any nightmares. But at night, I see tears squeezing through your closed eyes. I hear you yelling at your demons. You'd never admit that-

HAROLD smiles. HE nods his head no. HE opens his mouth to speak.

I've seen you do it. That's your subconscious, Harold. This is mine. And that means **you've** got to listen. I've let you interrupt so many times. Even here- where you have no control- just the thought of you- controls me. Even this distorted version of you.

You- are just a figment of my thoughts, buried expectations, fears, hopes, and some odd desire to satisfy the standard way of life as deemed appropriate by *I Married Joan* and *Life with Elizabeth* and all of the other stupid women on television!.

You were supposed to be strong. You were supposed to come back from the war and save me. Protect me.

But you didn't do that. You were *weak*.

Harold, while you were off living those nightmares that haunt you, I was here living the nightmares that haunt me. I was here trying to survive. I was broke. And I needed money, Harold. I needed something so that I could still be alive when you came back- if you came back. And dancing- oh what kind of a profession is that? But it was all I had. I was all I had.

And luckily... luckily men liked that.

When you came home, when you proposed- daddy changed his mind about me. He took me back in his big arms and said, "That's my girl- settling down. No more of that... tip toeing and spinning. That's asking for it. Go be taken care of, Nora. Every girl needs to be taken care of." I, without conscious consent, believed everything he said. And I decided I would let you take care of me.

And we've seen how terribly that's worked out.

As the above is said the lights slowly switch on stage and we return back to the reality light. HAROLD is still watching her.

VIGNETTE 14

The bird puppet returns, with the contract in beak. She grabs the contract and rips it. The light switches to the realistic desk as it rolls on by the puppeteers. The cup of tea still steaming.

NORA

Hello Operator, Carl Stevens, please.

Pause

Oh- oh Hello Carl- No- Harold is not doing better. I'm going to get you the contract today-... A cosigner? You hadn't said anything about a cosigner... I- My father will sign it.. Yes-

And the money? That soon? Oh Carl, that would be... wonderful! Thank you.

Yes- Thank you.. Again.

SHE hangs up the phone. SHE readjusts herself.

NORA

Father won't sign. There is no way. But- I

She picks up her pen and is about to sign. She places the pen down again.

*A commercial for Gillette razors- with Sharpie the Parrot **plays**.*

NORA takes a sip of tea. SHE stands up and walks towards the room in which Harold is in. Halfway across the stage, SHE changes her mind, crumbles the paper in her hand, and exits. HAROLD moans from the other room.

HAROLD

He wanders on stage, sickly looking once again.

Nora- could I have a coffee and biscuit, please dear?

Nora?

The phone on the desk rings.

Nora?

NORA?!

We hear a door slam.

NORA!

BLACKOUT.

FIN.

APPENDIX 1

Design Renderings & Models

Image 18:

Scenic Design by Andrew Cohen



Image 19:

Scenic Design Model by Andrew Cohen



Image 20:

Costume Design: Nora Look 1 by Rebecca DeLapp



Image 21:

Costume Design: Nora Look 2 by Rebecca DeLapp



Image 22:
Costume Design: Ensemble by Rebecca DeLapp



Appendix 2: Production Images

Photographs Reproduced with Permission by Photographer Stan Barouh

Image 23:

The entrance of the birds mark Nora's entrance to her daydream. (Vignette 1-2)



Image 24:

The bird steals the contract, all of the televisions turn on, and Nora enters her dark daydream. (Vignette 2)



Image 25:

Harold gives Nora money to soothe her winings. (Vignette 4)

“Oh no, my bird. Don’t sulk. You are not attractive with that dreadful face.”



Image 26:

Betty and Nora catch up on old times. (Vignette 6)

“And tea for me!”



Image 27:

Carl taunts Nora as she is controlled and confined by her the figments of her subconscious. (Vignette 7)

“Did your father even see this contract?”



Image 28:

Nora must make the decision whether or not to give Harold the letter revealing all of her indiscretions. (Vignette 11)

“Dance for me, Nora.”



Image 29:
Nora dances for her life. (Vignette 12)



Image 30:
Harold whispers his final sweet nothings to Nora before he discovers the letter from Carl telling him of her discretions. (Vignette 13)
“Sweet, sweet cherub.”



Image 31:

Nora finally confronts all of her demons. (Vignette 13)
“Listen to me!”



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